



BUSINESSMATTERS

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From the Commissioner



Dee Esser

I am pleased to introduce the first edition of **BUSINESSMATTERS**.

BUSINESSMATTERS is a quarterly electronic newsletter from the VEC designed to communicate to Virginia's employers. The VEC wants to make you, the Commonwealth's employers, aware of current issues. Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others who may also be interested in reading it.

Anyone who would like to subscribe may e-mail ptorrez@vec.state.va.us.

If you wish to update your e-mail address, please respond to this e-mail.

VEC Pilots Four Business Resource Units

The Commonwealth Accelerated Placement Project (CAPP) was created to develop strategies and stimulate the array of job services delivered by the field offices to VEC's business customers and job seekers. CAPP is focused on meeting the needs of job seekers by meeting the needs of employers first.

Due to a limited budget, the project could not be launched statewide. Instead, each Regional Director selected an office in his or her region to pilot CAPP. The four pilot locations are in the Prince William, Radford, Suffolk, and Tri-Cities field offices. The Suffolk Business Resource Unit (BRU) serves the entire Eastern region, whereas, the other three

BRUs serve their local office area.

The BRUs located in each region are working to improve the VEC's ability to assist businesses in meeting personnel needs and in returning job seekers to work sooner.

Each pilot has created a unique business plan, and different procedures are used in each region, but the leadership and direction of the workgroup have shared principles such as:

- A focus on business
- Development of an expertise in labor market information
- Support for existing Job Services operations in the field office

- Focus on returning claimants to work sooner
- Engaging partners in the process

The VEC hopes to demonstrate that it can attain a much higher level of success with the investment of a few additional resources. Hopefully, this success will assist top VEC management in continuing its quest for increasing the resources available to the entire agency. The managers and staff of all field offices are encouraged to cooperate with the pilots and to implement procedures to improve customer service.

How to Build a Successful Employer Advisory Committee

Comments by Pat Moore, Virginia State EAC Chair

Ideas on how to build your local EAC:

1. Work closely with the local VEC managers and staff.
2. Plan a monthly or bi-monthly breakfast or luncheon.
3. Have an interesting speaker and topic. Ask that they do it at no charge due to the exposure they will get. Showcase the VEC office.
4. Have your meetings at the same location each time.
5. Do a membership drive/contest.
6. Do a monthly bulletin/newsletter with articles contributed by the VEC and EAC members. List upcoming meetings and events.
7. Set up committees as well as a local chair, vice chair, membership chair, and treasurer.
8. Consider doing/sponsoring a job fair with the VEC.
9. Plan a special local or regional seminar two times per year.

If you would like to submit articles for consideration on best practices by EACs in your area, please e-mail jfogg@vec.state.va.us.

If you are not an EAC member, please contact your local VEC office to become one. You can find your nearest office at www.VaEmploy.Com.

Virginia Employment Commission Provides Health Insurance Assistance to Trade Claimants

The Virginia Employment Commission has received temporary grant funding to help trade-impacted claimants afford health insurance by paying 65 percent of qualifying health insurance premiums until a new federal program can take effect. As of mid-November, approximately 460 individuals had qualified for this assistance.

Under the federal Health Coverage Tax Credit (HCTC), Trade Act eligible claimants who are drawing Unemployment Insurance or TRA benefits can receive assistance to help make their insurance premium payments. Alternatively, these claimants can claim the tax credit for reimbursement of 65 percent of their health insurance premiums when they file their year-end taxes. However, the application process for federal HCTC benefits takes approximately two months to complete. In order to bridge that gap, the VEC applied for and received a grant to help claimants pay their insurance premiums while they apply with the Internal Revenue Service for HCTC benefits.

The new program was first implemented with the trade meetings for former Pillowtex workers in early October. The trade meetings included presentations about the new benefit, and claimants were offered the opportunity to sign up for insurance immediately after the meetings. In early November, a mailing went out to all claimants who are both eligible for Trade Act benefits and currently drawing either TRA or UI benefits. The mailing included a description of the program and an application form.

Advance Payment

In order to be eligible for payments under the VEC's HCTC Bridge Grant,

claimants must meet the following conditions:

- 1) Be eligible for assistance under the Trade Act and be drawing either TRA or UI benefits. As long as the claimant has drawn benefits in either the current or previous month, they are eligible.
- 2) Have health insurance, either through (a) their employer's COBRA plan, (b) through an individual policy purchased at least 30 days before the layoff, or (c) through a state qualified insurance plan. Currently, the only state qualified plans are offered by Anthem insurance.
- 3) Complete an application for the VEC HCTC Bridge Grant and provide proof of insurance that shows the name of the insurer and the amount of the premium. This could be a COBRA acceptance letter, a billing statement, or any other combination of proof that shows both the name of the insurer and the amount of the premium.
- 4) Complete an application for the federal HCTC program as soon as the claimant receives the application package from the IRS.

Year-End Reimbursement

If the claimant would prefer to receive a year-end reimbursement for 65 percent of qualifying health insurance credits, he or she does not need to fill out an application. Instead, the claimant can claim the year-end tax credit by filing IRS Form 8885 with their year-end taxes.

Duration of Payments

Currently, the VEC is authorized to make these payments only through June 30, 2004. VEC is a crucial partner with the IRS in making this program a success.

Legislation of Interest

HB 177 - Unemployment compensation; benefit eligibility for good cause.

HB 288 - Unemployment compensation; disqualification for benefits.

HB 505 - Unemployment compensation; weekly benefit amount.

HB 526 - Workforce Development, Department of; created.

HB 529 - Unemployment compensation; definition of employment services.

HB 546 - Research and development; Secretary of Technology to develop a policy.

HB 840 - Unemployment compensation; provision for victims of domestic violence.

HB 1231 - Collegial bodies; changes and conformity of provisions.

HB 1261 - Employment Commission; conveying certain real property.

HB 1412 - Health insurance plan; Sec. of Health and Human resources to ...

HB 1431 - Real estate tax; collection proceedings for delinquent taxes.

HB 1463 - Retail Sales and Use Tax;

SB 3 - Special funds; abolishes those that are dormant and their assoc. programs.

SB 9 - Employment Commission; eliminates requirement for development ...

SB 22 - Minimum wage; increased.

SB 128 - Unemployment compensation; eliminates offset for retirement benefits.

SB 130 - Unemployment compensation; penalties for late filing.

SB 179 - Unemployment compensation; benefit charges resulting from a temp ...

SB 194 - Unemployment compensation; allowed two weeks of benefits if ...

SB 304 - State agencies in executive branch; to identify drug treatment ...

SB 363 - Migrant & Seasonal Farm Workers Board & Migrant Worker Policy ...

SB 460 - Workforce Development Special Advisor for; created.

SB 621 - Unemployment compensation; minimum qualifying earnings.

SB 644 - Unemployment compensation; introduction of legislation affecting ...

If you would like to know more about a particular bill, please visit <http://legis.state.va.us>.